

Gap widens between rich and poor in obesity

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Kevin Huerta (left) and Lang Thao follow the moves of Gloria Lozano as she leads a fitness class for students at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif., on March 29, 2012. Photo: Paul Kitagaki Jr./Sacramento Bee/MCT

For years, American children were gaining more and more weight. Many of them were becoming obese, or so overweight that it threatened their health.

Yet, there has been some good news in the past few years.

A program to get kids to eat better and exercise more has been successful. It's been going on for several years. Child [obesity \(https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity\)](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity) seems to have stopped going up. And it might even go down.

But a new study suggests that not all kids are doing better. Obesity has continued to rise in young people from poorer families with less education. It's mostly teens from well-off families with better education who have become less obese.

By The Numbers

Nationally, obesity among young people ages 12 to 19 did not rise over several years. From 2003-2004 to 2009-2010 it didn't go up. But over those years, obesity among young people whose parents only have high-school educations or less went up. About one-fifth of those poorer kids were obese in 2003-2004. That number has now risen to one-quarter.

At the same time, obesity for teens whose parents finished college fell. They dropped from 1 in 7 to about 1 in 14.

Differences between rich and poor in obesity are not new. And, they are only one of many health problems that make poor patients sicker and more likely to die early than richer ones.

Health experts have been trying to warn all Americans about the dangers of obesity. But the new report suggests that the warnings have not reached everyone. If true, this could make it harder to cut obesity. And in the years ahead it could lead to a rise in diseases related to obesity.

Scientists from Harvard University surveyed youth about their eating and how often they exercise. They found that exercise may be key. It could be the main reason for the difference in obesity between rich and poor.

The scientists surveyed young people with parents who graduated from college. They asked how many had exercised or played a sport for at least 20 minutes in the last seven days. In 2011, 9 out of 10 of them said they had done so.

They also surveyed kids with parents who did not go beyond high school. They asked them the same question about exercising in the past week. Only 8 out of 10 said they had done so.

Lack Of Exercise

Kids from every type of background have gotten the message that they should take in fewer calories from eating and drinking. And kids from poorer families took in fewer calories to begin with. As of 2010, the teenage children of parents who graduated college took in 2,150 calories. Poorer kids took in 2,105 calories a day.

Many things determine our weight. We partly get our body types and genes from our parents. Some people's bodies burn food faster than others. Different cultures eat different types of foods. It may even depend on where you live.

But, the biggest reason for our weight is simple: If we take in more in calories than we burn energy through physical activity, we gain weight.

In the poorer group of adolescents, almost 1 in 5 are getting no exercise at all. That makes obesity more likely. Since both poor and well-off kids take in about the same amount of calories, poor kids are likelier to be obese.

Obesity among kids leads to future obesity among adults. Health experts want to prevent this. But, they'll have to figure out why poorer kids don't get as much exercise, the latest study said. Lack of recreation centers, playgrounds, and streets and sidewalks are a problem. They're important in helping people stay active. They encourage walking, biking and playing.

But, this is not the whole story. The same scientists also found that children of well-off parents have gotten more into high school sports. But kids from poorer, less well-educated families have gotten less involved.

Quiz

- 1 What are the two main ideas of the text?
 - (A) Obesity is increasing among poor and uneducated children, but they are exercising more and more recently.
 - (B) Obesity is increasing among poor and uneducated children, but decreasing among rich and educated children.
 - (C) Obesity is increasing among poor and uneducated children who exercise with rich and educated children.
 - (D) Obesity is increasing among rich and educated children, but decreasing among poor and uneducated children.

- 2 What could be another headline for the article?
 - (A) Study says students should exercise much more while at school
 - (B) Calories are connected to which sports children play and enjoy
 - (C) Poor, uneducated children are developing eating disorders in the U.S.
 - (D) Obesity rates show poor children aren't keeping pace with richer children

- 3 Select the paragraph that in "Lack Of Exercise" that tries to explain why some poor children aren't getting enough exercise.

- 4 All of the following contributes to weight EXCEPT:
 - (A) the genes from our parents
 - (B) how quickly we can burn food
 - (C) the food options where one lives
 - (D) the length of a physical education class

Answer Key

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